'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'
Edited by Dr. Arthur Somervell

Mozart's String Quartets

by Thomas F. Dunhill

Book II

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'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'

General Editor *Dr. Arthur Somervell*

MOZART'S STRING QUARTETS

BY

THOMAS F. DUNHILL

BOOK II

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CONTENTS

BOOK II

II. The Six String Quartets dedicated to Haydn (*continued*)

Quartet in B flat (K. 458) . . 5

Quartet in A (K. 464) . . 11

Quartet in C (K. 465) . . 16

III. The Last String Quartets . . 25

Quartet in D (K. 499) . . 25

Adagio and Fugue (K. 546) . . 30

Quartet in D (K. 575) . . 34

Quartet in B flat (K. 589) . . 38

Quartet in F (K. 590) . . 39

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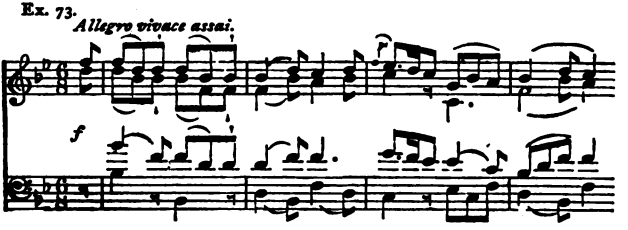
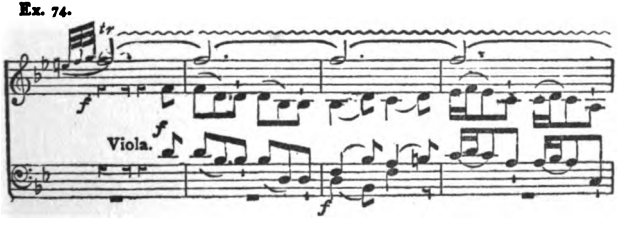
BOOK II

The Six String Quartets dedicated to Haydn (continued)

THE B flat Quartet (K. 458), which comes next in the series as No. 4, is known in Germany as the 'Jagd-Quartet', from the character of the leading theme of the first movement, which is of the jovial 'hunting-horn' type, and is in $\frac{6}{8}$ time, as such pieces generally are. It starts off in the most direct manner

Ex. 73.

and pursues an easy and merry course in the same vein for about forty bars, sometimes enlivened by bustling semiquaver scales. At the 26th bar the theme conveys a very definite suggestion of horns, below a trill on the 1st violin:

Ex. 74.

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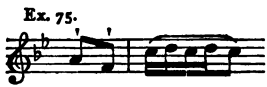
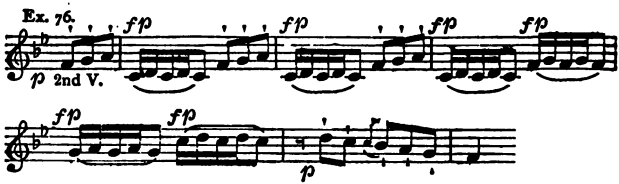
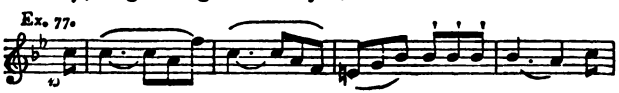
The key of B flat is maintained with almost dogged persistence, but eventually a quite simple modulatory passage leads to the dominant of F, when a little tag-phrase,

Ex. 75.

is immediately repeated by all the instruments separately 'with a mocking sort of air', as Jahn says, and afterwards 'retained and treated as the germ of numerous freely developed images'. It is the basis, first of all, of what must be called the 2nd subject—which is in reality more a succession of glittering musical spangles than a definite theme. The 2nd violin leads off:

Ex. 76.

This is repeated in the upper octave by the leader, and the exposition closes with some references to sections of the hunting theme. Perhaps because he has not provided a well-defined 2nd subject, Mozart starts the development section with an entirely new 16-bar melody, beginning in F major,

Ex. 77.

and ending, unexpectedly, in F minor. Fragmentary semiquaver groups, akin to those in Ex. 75, are then

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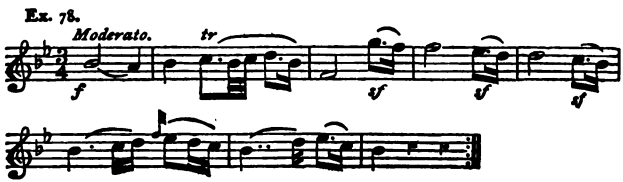
resumed, and tossed from one instrument to another in sportive fashion. Eventually we return to the main subject and the recapitulation is crowned with a Coda which is exceptionally long for Mozart. It appears to have a special purpose. As if to make up for what he had failed to do in the middle of the movement, Mozart expends his energies afresh on a very systematic imitative treatment of the hunting theme, and though he never ventures to stray from the tonality of B flat, there is so much rhythmical variety that the unchanged key-colouring does not create a feeling of monotony. If there is one thing that the composers of the eighteenth century understood far better than those of the twentieth, it was how to stay in one key without weariness!

A Minuet, suave and courteous, of the true minuet character, comes next. It is not the best or most typical Mozart. The rhythmic balance of the melody, however, is interesting and a little complicated; detached phrases are grouped in a curious way, which makes the tune a little difficult to grasp as a whole.

Ex. 78.

There are no unexpected structural features. It is as short as the Minuets of the early quartets. The Trio, which remains in B flat, has a more easily felt continuity, and is in Mozart's favourite 10-bar formation.

The slow movement is the great outstanding feature of the work. It is really a slow movement—the only

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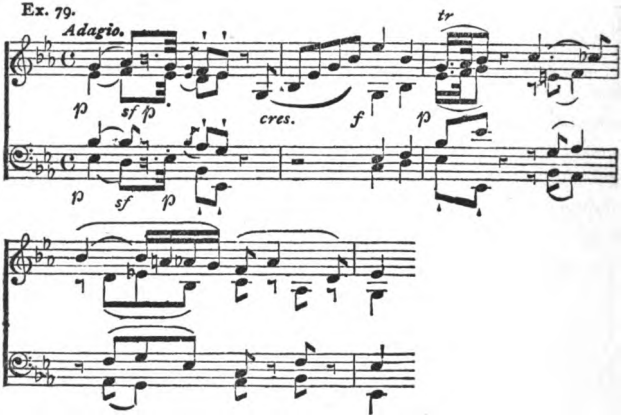
actual Adagio of the six quartets—and boasts an extremely eloquent and dignified theme. Nobility of outline is combined with rhythmic subtlety. It is an aristocratic melody in the grand manner, but there is no hint of pretentiousness :

After this impressive start the melody is carried aloft by the 1st violin, and becomes at once of a richly florid character without ever losing 'that floating Grecian grace', as Schumann described the lovely outlines of Mozart's music. The movement is so continuous, and each phrase is so dependent upon what has immediately preceded it, that it is almost impossible to elucidate by means of quotation. The sinuous grace of a passage such as the following, for instance, beautiful though it may be to contemplate in isolation, is far more satisfying amongst relevant surroundings (Ex. 80). Only a study of the score will reveal how the composer, with unerring art, continues this conversation between 1st violin and 'cello, gradually adding movement to the

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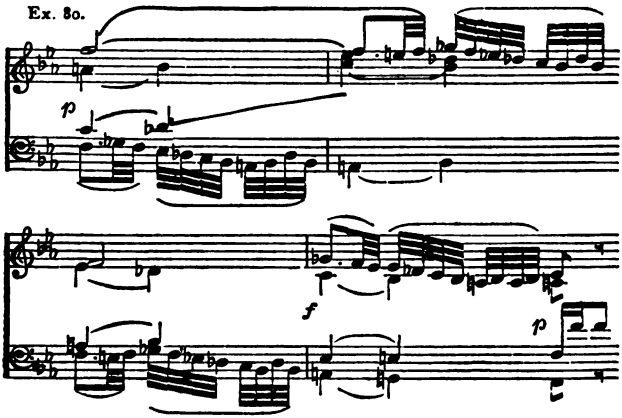
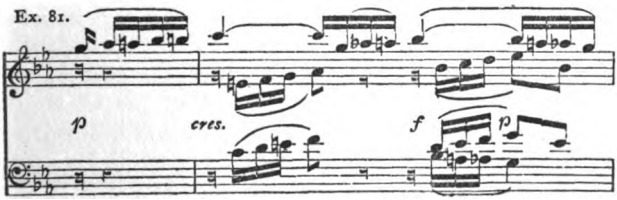
accompanying harmonies, until the score seems almost to tremble with demisemiquavers, and the opening theme is touched upon again, to be carried even further

Ex. 80.



aloft than before. Most of the material is, in fact, repeated a fourth higher this time, until after an interrupted cadence we have a finish which breathes the spirit of heavenly peace. Parry, whose appreciation of Mozart's music is too often lukewarm and reluctant, speaks of this conclusion as a beautiful instance of a Coda constructed out of ejaculatory fragments of the 1st subject, 'never touching its first phrase, but passing like a sweet broken reminiscence':

Ex. 81.

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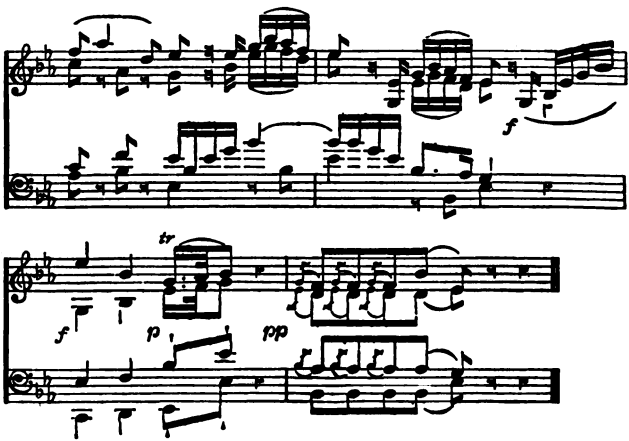
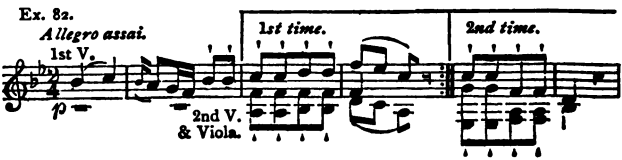

The Finale, reverting to the joyous gaiety of the first movement, breaks the spell. It has a subject which is almost careless in its abandonment to the obvious, and yet fascinates from the sheer audacity of saying, without shame, the first impudent thought that comes to hand :

Perhaps it was the last two bars of this which Beethoven had in his mind when he made the quaint cadence to the subject of the final movement of his G major piano Concerto—for it is a strange touch of irresponsible humour for two musicians to light upon independently. Mozart is so hugely pleased with the

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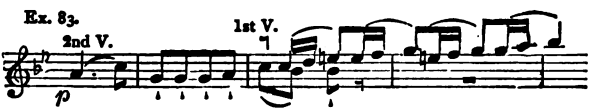
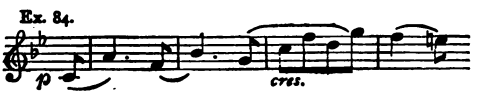
little joke he has perpetrated that he repeats this skittish phrase of five notes no less than six times in the course of twelve bars, until it becomes a kind of catch-word which we are ready to recognize and smile at whenever it is uttered. The cheery score might have been signed by Haydn himself—it is far more like Haydn than Mozart.

It should be noted that this movement, though sometimes described as a Rondo, is really in sonata form. It has, however, three definite subjects instead of the usual two. The second and third themes are both in F major, and of equal importance. One begins in sprightly sections, connected by a little feathery scale-phrase for the 1st violin :

Ex. 83.



the other provides the only episode of quiet sustained writing in the movement, and thus affords a much-needed moment of comparative repose :

Ex. 84.

The development section is occupied entirely with a spirited treatment of the 1st subject, and the recapitulation reproduces all three subjects in the tonic key, without deviation from conventional methods.

The Quartet in A, No. 5 of the set (K. 464), is undoubtedly, to modern ears, a less arresting and a less eventful work than any of its five companions. It is certainly not popular with present-day string players,

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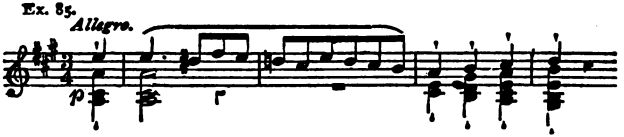
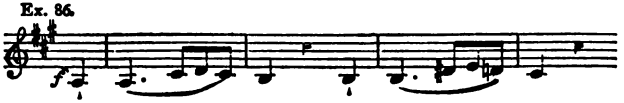
and is seldom performed in public. Why? The work has a quiet graciousness all its own, and, if its sentiment never runs very deep, there is no lack of that polished phraseology and fluent inevitable part-writing which distinguishes Mozart's music at its best. The style, however, is particularly reticent, and the expenditure of thematic material particularly economical. It is also, perhaps, rather less individual than usual, and more continuously expressive of that 'disinterestedness' which a French writer has declared to be the cardinal quality of Mozart's most typical compositions.

The first movement of the quartet is almost entirely suave and flowing, and is easy to listen to from the opening bars:

Ex. 85.

This engaging phrase is repeated a degree lower in the scale, followed by another sequential passage, *f*, and in unison for all four instruments:

Ex. 86.

The progress towards the 2nd subject has some unusual harmonic features. The dominant chord of E major is reached through an extension of the main theme in the key of C, a 6–3 chord on C, and an augmented 6th chord on C. We are then ready for the new theme, which is again graceful in character, but enlivened with bright running triplet groups:

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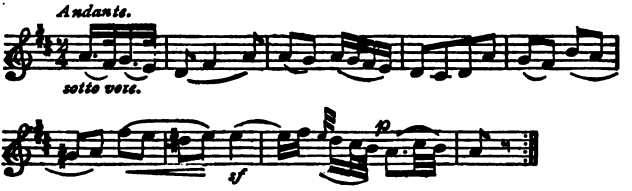
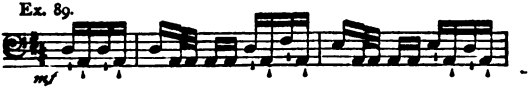
Ex. 87.

The exposition is short; the development (in comparison) is rather long; it deals principally with the 1st subject and its corollary, Ex. 86.

The second movement consists of an Andante with variations. The theme, in D major, is melodious without being specially distinguished. The first half is as follows:

Ex. 88.

The variations are rather elaborately wrought. This is the only movement of the quartet which deals with any complexities of texture, and it is lengthy in proportion with the rest of the work, especially if the repeat-marks are observed. Mozart's aim has evidently been to give all the players enterprising passages to play. Points worthy of note are the florid decorations of the 1st violin in Var. 1, the deft use of undulating triplet semiquavers in a beautiful D minor variation, and the extended developments embarked upon in a most effective Finale which is built almost entirely upon a springing bass of march-like rhythm:

Ex. 89.

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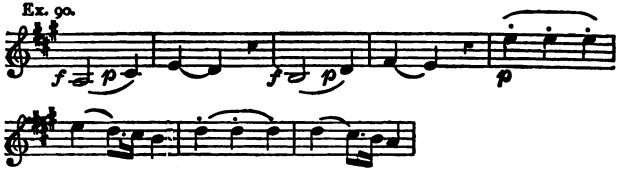
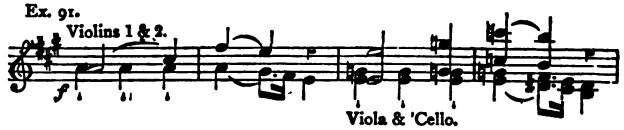
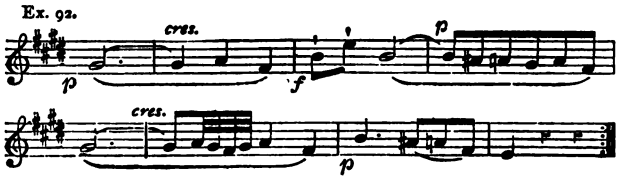
The Minuet, like the opening Allegro, is based upon two little melodic sequences, one upward, the other downward :

Ex. 90.

The merit of these phrases is the ease with which they can be combined together, as the succeeding four bars will show :

Ex. 91.

They are also treated by inversion and in canon. The whole of the Minuet is based upon such ingenious combinations, which are manipulated with extraordinary facility. The Trio, in E major, derived from the following melody, set above a descending 'cello scale, is delightful :

Ex. 92.

The rhythm of the 3rd bar comes in for some discussion by the 2nd violin, below some free triplet quavers, and much use is made of scale movement, both in crotchets and quavers.

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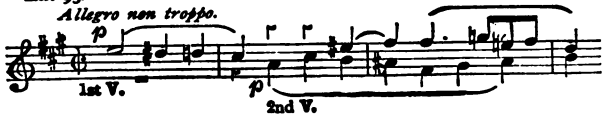
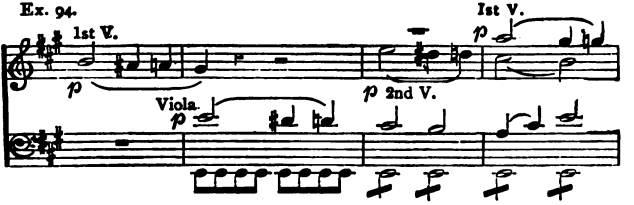
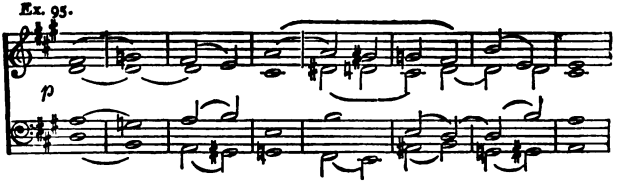
In the Finale we once again have a theme founded on sequences, which begins with one of those little chromatic figures from which Mozart is always able to extract every ounce of meaning:

Ex. 93.

The construction of the movement is curious. It is in sonata form, but the 2nd subject is practically the same as the 1st, transposed to E major and turned into a kind of canon above a tonic pedal:

Ex. 94.



There is consequently only one main idea, and variants of it occupy most of the development, although in that section the continuity is interrupted, most happily, by a beautiful chorale-like theme in D major, which (except for two chromatic bars) is not apparently derived from anything which has previously been heard:

Ex. 95.

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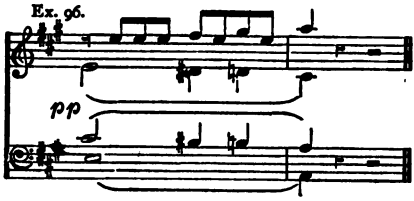
The Chorale is continued with flowing semiquaver embroideries on the 2nd violin, and we are soon led back to the 1st subject. After the usual recapitulation there is a Coda, still expatiating upon Ex. 93, and this effectively written, but rather unvaried Finale ends with a cadence which once more faintly whispers the oft-repeated text of the composer's discourse :

Ex. 96.



The Quartet in C (K. 465), the last of the six dedicated to Haydn, opens with the mystical Adagio introduction which is not only memorable for its anticipation of modern chromaticism but famous for the remarkable stir that it created at the time of its first appearance. Perhaps never in musical history has so great a fuss been made about so few bars of music.

The chief offence against convention was the audacity of the ' false-relations ', which, however, were as naught in comparison with those which old William Byrd had perpetrated in England more than two centuries earlier, and which had been accepted with little question by an unsophisticated and less rule-ridden generation. However, the authorities in 1785 decreed that Mozart was guilty of an offence against good sense and good taste, or, as some believed, had allowed the parts to be issued full of mistakes. A few patrons even returned them to the publishers for the printers'

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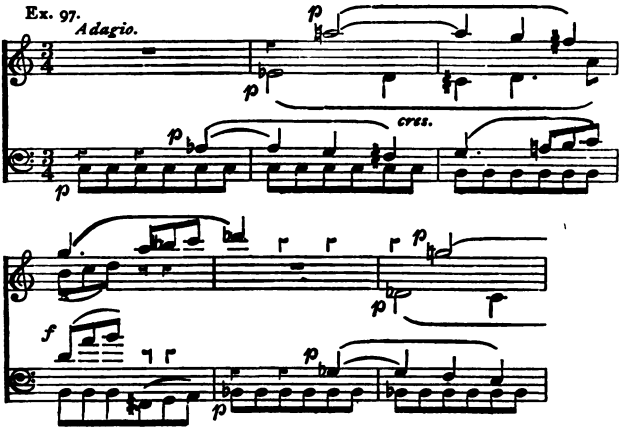
errors to be remedied! But Mozart and the engravers were right, and public opinion was wrong.

The worst of controversy of this kind is that it makes it difficult for musicians, even a century and a half later, to view the matter quite dispassionately, and to judge the offending passage purely on its merits. Here are the opening bars:

Ex. 97. *Adagio.*



Even in these days, when 'false relations' are as plentiful in music as ripe blackberries in September, and often as succulent, the slightly acid effect of the A natural with which the 1st violin enters in the 2nd bar, and the similarly placed G natural in the 6th bar, convey a certain feeling of strangeness. The other deviations from orthodoxy, over which the pedants of the day shook their hoary heads, are, however, less apparent to us in sound than on paper, and we can easily realize, as Haydn said, that if Mozart wrote them 'he had a good reason for it'. That good

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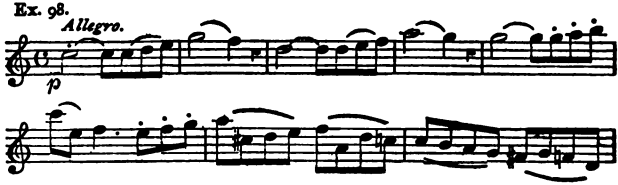
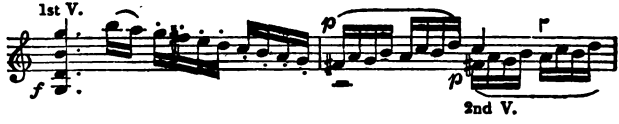
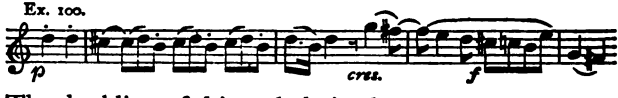
reason was obviously the spirit of questioning which he wished to express at the moment, and it is not likely that either conformity or non-conformity to technical rules entered into his calculations. The mood lasts for fifteen bars. There is then a prolonged resting-point on a clear dominant basis—six bars and a pause—which prepares the mind for the Allegro. This discloses a long shapely tune, which is plain sailing after what has gone before, though it is obviously full of possibilities :

Ex. 98.

Imitative treatment of the opening bars, and some bustling semiquaver figures, usher in a lively 2nd subject :

Ex. 99.

There is some free play with the broken-third passage of the 2nd bar before a 3rd subject of equal importance appears :

Ex. 100.

The doubling of this melody in the tenth below on the 2nd violin is a charming device, and the chromatic counterpoint which is woven beneath the latter half

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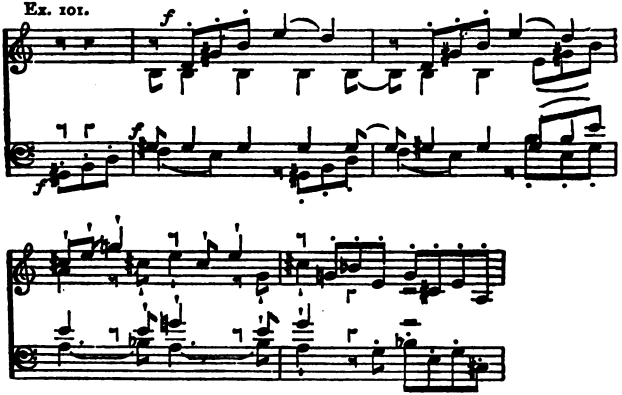
of the above phrase is exquisitely wrought. Development of the 1st subject is embarked upon sixteen bars before the double bar, as if the composer were impatient to show what he could do with a fruitful theme before the appointed time. He has, however, a large fund of inventiveness in reserve. Jahn's opinion that in Mozart's first movements the centre of gravity is always to be found in the working-out portion is nowhere better justified than in this particular instance. The energy is splendidly sustained: for forty-eight bars the music moves from strength to strength with unflagging rhythmical resource. The opening phrase of the 1st subject is the chief fount of inspiration. Not only does it appear in its original shape, but it is the rhythmical parent of a long sequence of fine imitative passages, of which the following is a good example:

Ex. 101.

Recapitulation presents no unusual features, but there is a Coda of considerable importance, and a beautiful *pp* close on a tonic pedal.

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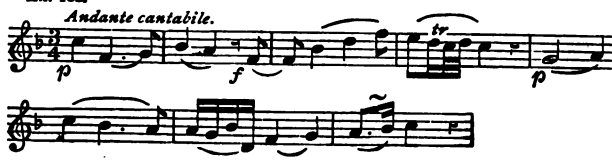
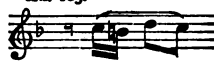
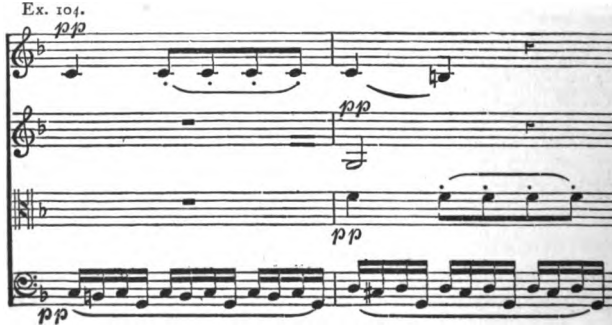
The Allegro is followed by an Andante cantabile of exceptionally tender expressiveness—possibly the most emotionally satisfying slow movement from any of Mozart's quartets. It opens with a queenly melody:

Ex. 102.

An episode, in which a most intriguing little curly figure of four notes

Ex. 103.

is dealt with conversationally, by 1st violin and 'cello in turn, leads to a second theme, fully as expressive as the first, which climbs upward over a wavy bass and is very noteworthy for the colouring resulting from the free crossing of the parts:

Ex. 104.

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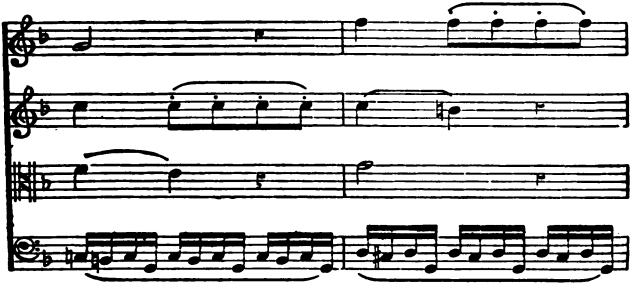
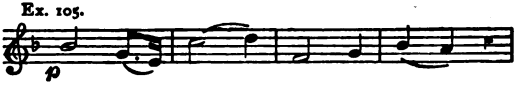

Upon these three ideas the whole fabric is built up, until, at the Coda, a new song of calm, almost holy beauty is sung by the 1st violin :

Ex. 105.

The enchantment of its setting is indescribable ; between melody and bass there is a throbbing line of semiquavers over and under which the curling repetitions of Ex. 102 continuously emerge with gentle insistence. Jahn has described this Andante as music which ' soars aloft into a region of blessedness where suffering and passion are transfigured ', a species of verbal rapturizing which, for once, seems fully justified.

The Minuet is, in its way, almost as striking, and comes before us with a confident air which is particularly manly after the somewhat feminine sensitiveness of the preceding movement (Ex. 106). The alternation of *p* and *f* phrases continues throughout the Minuet. The graceful shape of the opening quavers, the repeated chords, the striding unison passage, each and all form fruitful topics for the masterly discussion

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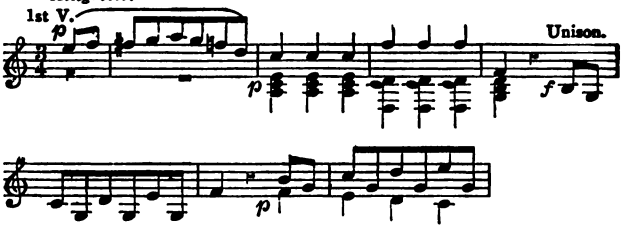
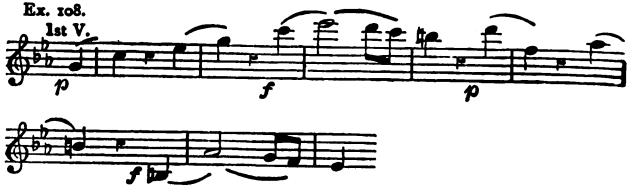
Ex. 106.



which ensues, and there is, in addition, a delicately poised cadential phrase which will not escape attention :

Ex. 107.

The Trio, in C minor, also owes much of its effect to its charm of phrasing and dynamic contrasts, as well as to the free use of wide melodic intervals :

Ex. 108.

The accompanying figures, so daintily bowed, which bind the phrases together should also be recognized for their delicate value in the general design.

The Finale is one of those movements in which certain characteristics of Rondo form are combined with the more interesting and important features of

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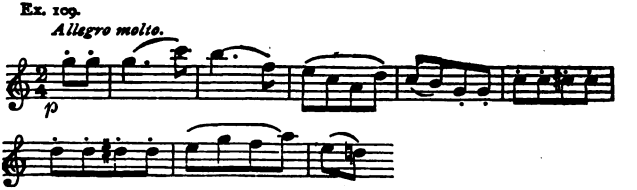
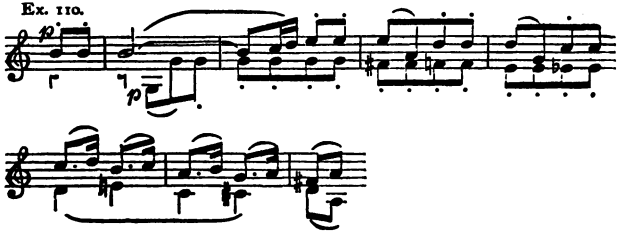
first-movement construction—a favourite procedure with Mozart. The principal subject, cheerful though it is, has none of the gaiety or flippancy of the Finale of the B flat Quartet (K. 458), which it somewhat resembles in formation :

Ex. 109.

The first three notes of this tune are the mainspring of much that is to come; sometimes they are used as forceful ejaculations, sometimes as gentle commentaries upon what is proceeding in other directions. They are also used to start the 2nd subject, which begins as a little duet for the two violins :

Ex. 110.

A new feature is here introduced in the falling fifths which are added to the ubiquitous repeated notes. This feature becomes very important later on. A 3rd subject—and a very serious one—suddenly appears at the conclusion of a rapid torrent of semiquavers. It

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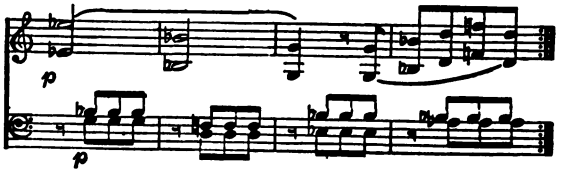
is in E flat major, and quite unprepared for by modulation.

Ex. 111.

It hovers for a few moments like a little cloud—

> A frown upon the atmosphere
> Which hath no business to appear,

but is dispelled by a flight of semiquavers and a resumption of the sky-blue clarity of G major, which prevails till the double bar. The development is brief but crammed full of eagerness and good things. First we have the main theme transposed to C minor, followed by a kaleidoscopic series of swift transitions through astonishingly remote keys. The score bristles with sharps and flats in close proximity. A return to C major brings with it the entry into the recapitulation section. This is normal except for a very considerable extension of the third theme, Ex. 111, which appears first in the key of A flat and is then treated, most effectively, in canon between the 'cello and 1st violin, in D flat. The Coda is tremendously vivacious, and ends with a veritable carnival of those falling fifths from Ex. 110, which sparkle like firework-stars up to the very last note of the music.

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III

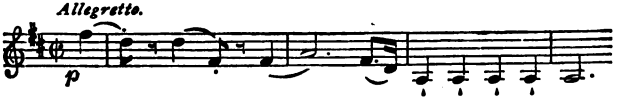
The Last String Quartets

The reception accorded to the six great quartets which have just been discussed was evidently not sufficiently encouraging to Mozart to induce him to compose more works in the same form for some little time to come. Not until August 1786 did he resume his interest in quartet writing. He then wrote the single work in D major (K. 499). It has been said that in this quartet there 'may be traced an attempt to meet the taste of the public without sacrificing the dignity of the quartet style'. It is difficult to find a reason for thus attributing a conciliatory attitude to the composer in this instance, but the statement, appearing in Jahn's biography, has been widely repeated as authoritative, and is generally to be found in descriptions of this quartet by other writers.

Like Beethoven's F minor, Op. 95, it stands isolated from its fellows, and possesses some characteristics which distinguish it from the other quartets of Mozart in style. It is an optimistic work, sounding a note of earnestness in all its movements, but never touching our hearts with the revelations of deep feeling to which the finest pages of the quartets dedicated to Haydn give utterance.

The opening Allegretto is based upon a unison theme of purely chordal construction, the effect of which is derived from precision of rhythm and phrasing rather than from melodic outline:

Ex. 112.



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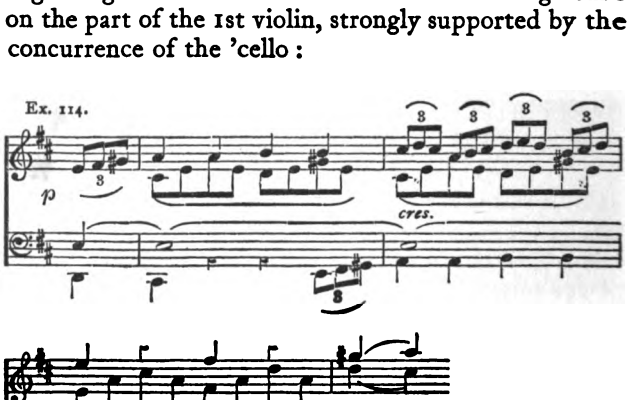
The last six beats of this are repeated on differing degrees of the scale and, after a cadence, there is some dallying with a combination of the slurred phrases and the dotted-note figure, the instruments dividing themselves up into pairs. A new and more forceful theme beginning in B minor then claims attention :

Ex. 113.

The tonality is undecided for a time, but a version of the first theme in E major leads to what must, presumably, be regarded as the proper 2nd subject, beginning with a confident and rather valiant gesture on the part of the 1st violin, strongly supported by the concurrence of the 'cello :

Ex. 114.



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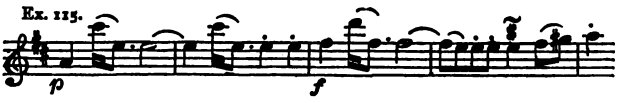
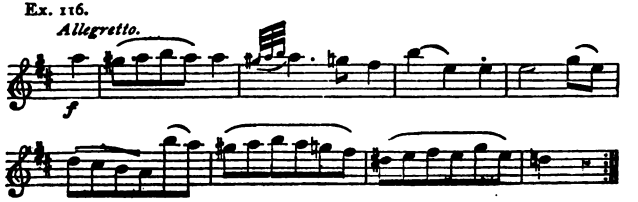
Our sojourn in the key of A is very soon terminated. A phrase or two in F sharp minor, immediately followed by some new matter in F major, gives us a sense of restlessness and insecure tonality which is very rare in Mozart. As we near the double bar, however, things become more settled, and a new theme, noteworthy for its dependence upon falling sixths and a pronounced 'Scotch-snap' rhythm, is repeated several times:

Ex. 115.

The development section is very short and concerned solely with the 1st subject. This passes through several keys and is inverted, and there is an unceasing scintillation of staccato quavers in sixths, thirds, and tenths (derived from the final bars of the exposition) to accompany its progress.

Recapitulation presents no irregular features, and a short Coda deals lightly and cheerfully with the 1st subject and the afore-mentioned staccato quaver figures.

The next movement is one of Mozart's happiest and most crisply concise Minuets, with an absolutely formal but very aristocratic melody:

Ex. 116.

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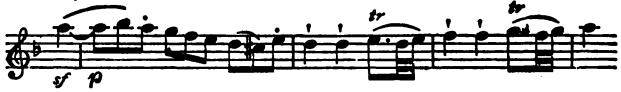
The Trio, in D minor, is equally courtly, but its busy triplet shapes, seldom absent from the score, give it an air of superior animation :

Ex. 117.

It may be noted, in passing, that there is no resting-point at the conclusion of the Trio, for a second-time bar leads without break to the repeat of the Minuet. This became an habitual process later on with Beethoven and Schubert, but it is seldom to be found in Mozart, and it is difficult to cite a similar example, off-hand, from his works.

An Adagio follows, notable for chaste perfection of outline rather than warmth of expression. It is indeed a somewhat prim movement, with a theme which, in itself, suggests a curtsey :

Ex. 118.

The development of this theme seldom seeks to disturb its normal placidity. There are one or two short-lived episodes of momentary forcefulness, but in the main Mozart is content to pursue a straight course of conventional pattern-making, binding each section into a larger design which, thus framed, expresses perfect decorative beauty but little emotional significance.

The Finale deals largely with broken phrases which at the outset, since the Adagio ended in G major, seem to be still in the same key as that which has gone before :

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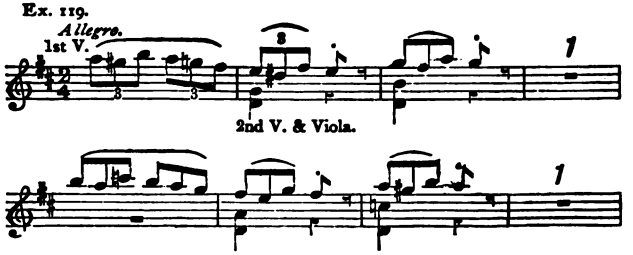
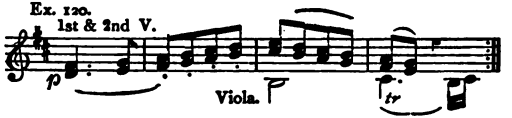
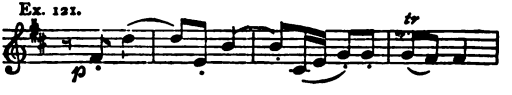
Ex. 119.

This opening gives promise of some rather roguish merry-making. There is something of the gay humour of Papageno both here and later. Is it possible that *Die Zauberflöte*, written a few years afterwards, was already simmering in Mozart's mind when he wrote this genial Rondo? After the triplet figures have flourished for some forty bars there is an almost comic *pp* pause, and, still in the key of D, the two violins embark upon something new and equally cheery. This is the gist of what they have to say, and they say it twice over, above a repeated tonic pedal note on the 'cello :

Ex. 120.

We may note how the viola rather rudely interrupts them each time, and how, when the repetition is over, the spirit of Papageno seems to appear once more in a new guise :

Ex. 121.

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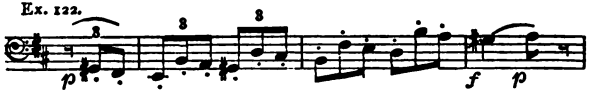
This is a sportive phrase which demands our attention, and gains it by many repetitions, so that we are ready to recognize the outline when it appears later on in combination with the triplets of the 1st subject. The last two bars, especially, are much thrust into prominence.

There is only one other thematic fragment to which attention need be called, and that is a climbing succession of triplets in which the 'cello asserts its importance:

Ex. 122.

With these jolly little scraps of fun—one cannot better describe them—Mozart has built up one of his most bracing and breezy movements. If this was 'an attempt to meet the public taste' one is glad that the public taste was so highly rated by the composer. One hopes, also, that his public was sensible enough to realize its good fortune in possessing a writer who could enshrine the spirit of impish comedy in the purest of all art-forms without the slightest sacrifice of dignity or constructive skill.

Three years elapsed before Mozart composed full-length quartets again. Before these are discussed, however, there is one serious work for the same combination which is worthy of more than passing mention at this juncture—his Adagio and Fugue in C minor for String Quartet (K. 546), produced in June 1788. This splendid composition was, in part, an adaptation of a former work, the Fugue having been originally

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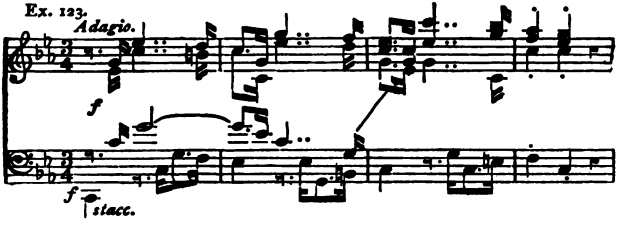
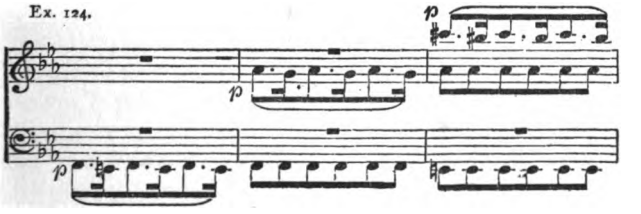
conceived and published for two pianofortes. It is interesting to recall that in its original form this Fugue so impressed Beethoven that he copied it out in score—a score which is still in existence in manuscript.

When Mozart re-wrote his Fugue for string quartet he added an important introductory Adagio of very great dignity and impressiveness. The opening is remarkably fine:

Ex. 123.



The writing for the strings, after this forcible beginning, becomes extraordinarily sensitive, and towards the close an enharmonic modulation, from F minor through A minor to the dominant of C, is so lovely that one is tempted to quote it in full—if for no other reasons than that the work is quite unknown to most musicians, even to those who are particular admirers of Mozart, and that the score is not easily accessible.

Ex. 124.

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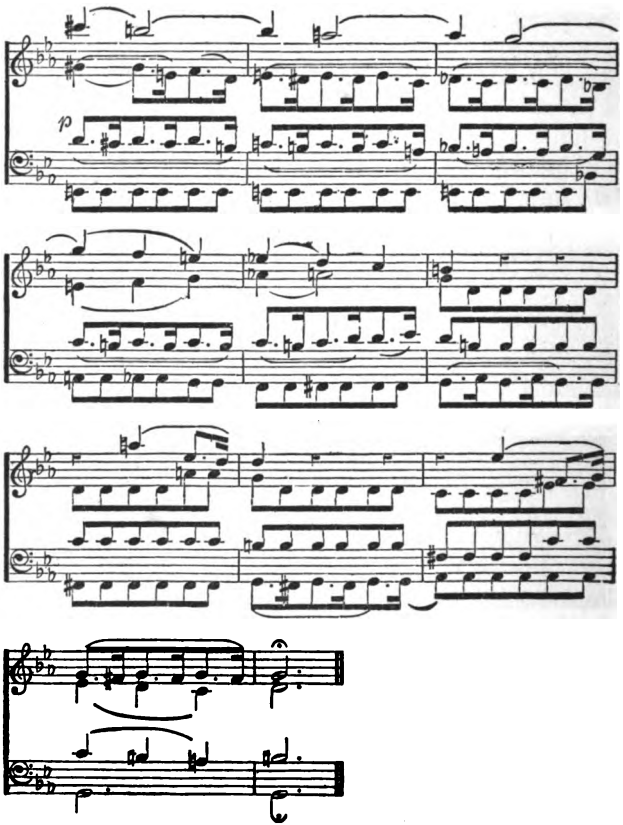
As Jahn says, the 'remarkable effects of suspense and climax' here tune the mind to 'a pitch of longing and melancholy which makes the entry of the Fugue a positive relief and stimulant'. Here is the magnificently defiant subject of the Fugue, given out by the 'cello:

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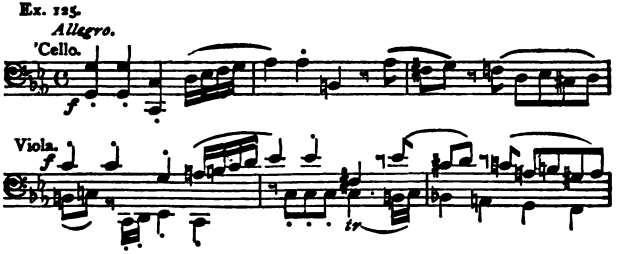
Ex. 125.

That the influence of Bach is paramount is evident from a mere glance at the notes, and not only in the main theme is this influence felt but in the freedom and rhythmical independence of the counter-subject (bars 4 to 6 of the 'cello part). We know from Jahn's biography that at this particular period Mozart was greatly impressed by Bach's forty-eight Preludes and Fugues, which he was studying deeply, and that he made arrangements of at least five of the Fugues for string quartet. That he desired to follow in the footsteps of his great predecessor is clear from the style of many of his works at this time. In skill of working-out this quartet-fugue seems at every point fully equal to Bach at his best. Mozart when writing in a strict contrapuntal style, however, was inclined to severity of manner, so that his works in the fugal form are often less genial and less varied than those of his model. Outside this style he delighted, as we know, in a lightness and delicacy of texture which Bach would probably have considered mere musical frivolity, but as a contrapuntist Mozart takes himself and his responsibilities very seriously indeed. He dons his thinking-cap and becomes a little too self-conscious. Nevertheless this Fugue is developed at considerable length with unfailing resourcefulness in every bar. The *stretti*

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alone are remarkable: the subject is used by inversion, in combination with itself, with the greatest ease. Moreover, the work shows no trace whatever of having once been a piano piece. It is not so much an arrangement as a reconception. It is as fine a piece of pure string-quartet writing as even Mozart has to show.

The three Quartets composed by Mozart in 1789 and 1790 were destined to be his last works in that form. The charge levelled against the Quartet in D (K. 499) might far more aptly be brought forward in connexion with these compositions, which were most certainly written with the object of pleasing, not perhaps the general public, but somebody other than the composer himself. Whilst staying in Berlin and Potsdam early in 1789 Mozart attended many of the private concerts given by Frederick William II, King of Prussia. This monarch was an enthusiastic violoncellist, and commissioned Mozart to write some string quartets for him (as he had previously requisitioned the talents of Haydn and Boccherini in a similar way). In June of 1789 the composer completed the first of his quartets for the king, the work in D major (K. 575); a year later he contributed two more for the same patron, those in B flat major (K. 589) and F major (K. 590).

We know that at this period of his career Mozart was almost overwhelmed with cares and sorrows, and afflicted with great poverty. He was grateful for the king's gift—100 Friedrichs d'or—and his promise of further remuneration on the completion of the quartets, and he set to work with a will. But the task did not prove easy, and it was painful effort to complete the scores. In the circumstances it is surprising how little one is conscious of this effort in listening to

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the music. At moments, maybe, there are traces of a lack of that spontaneity and facility which hitherto seemed characteristic of Mozart at all times. Emotionally the quartets are on a far lower plane than any of the six works dedicated to Haydn, and the quality of most of the themes is decidedly inferior to those of the D major Quartet discussed earlier in this chapter. There is less sustained thought, and the developments give nothing like the former display of contrapuntal ingenuity. The subjects, indeed, seem hardly strong enough to be capable of such treatment, and Mozart evidently knew it, for over and over again he seeks to hide their weakness by side-tracking and avoiding the awkward issues.

The peculiar characteristic that compels attention, and places these quartets in a different category from all others, is the exceptional prominence of the violoncello parts. Mozart evidently set to work with one great object constantly in view—to please the royal 'cellist by giving him plenty of grateful solo passages to play, with frequent opportunities for showing off his A string. In some of the movements all the principal melodies are given to the 'cello, which virtually usurps the place of the usual leader. Even the choice of keys is obviously determined by the desire to give prominence to this one instrument, and there is no question that such a form of preferential treatment, though interesting as an experiment, is injurious to the character of the works as ensemble music. The close study of these quartets will, however, be of great value to composition students, for the management of an accompaniment to high solo 'cello passages is one of the most difficult problems that a composer of string quartets has to grapple with. One need hardly say

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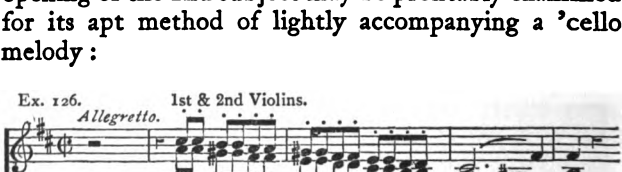
that Mozart's technical artistry in such situations is never at fault, and that the solutions he offers are always finely balanced and musically effective.

In what attempts to be a proportionate estimate of Mozart's quartets it is desirable not to go astray by giving too much space to a discussion of works which exhibit an unfortunate decline in musical inventiveness as well as certain retrograde tendencies. These quartets, in any case, do not call for detailed analysis, although one would gladly dwell upon certain happy features which show that the composer's inspiration had not entirely deserted him.

The first movement of the first quartet (in D, K. 575) has a square and rather ordinary principal theme, but the opening of the 2nd subject may be profitably examined for its apt method of lightly accompanying a 'cello melody:

Ex. 126. 1st & 2nd Violins.



The Andante, for which the composer has chosen the key of A (a most unusual relationship), has a flowing theme which dwells somewhat too insistently on the mediant note, and some melodic passages for the 'cello, which soar as high as the C sharp on the third space of the treble clef—a rather rarefied altitude in those days.

The subject of the Minuet, knowing what Mozart had done before in this form, is almost tame and trite, though he could not help shaping his phrases so grace-

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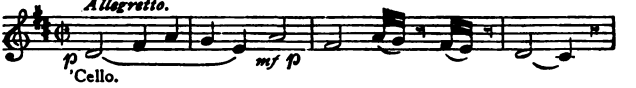
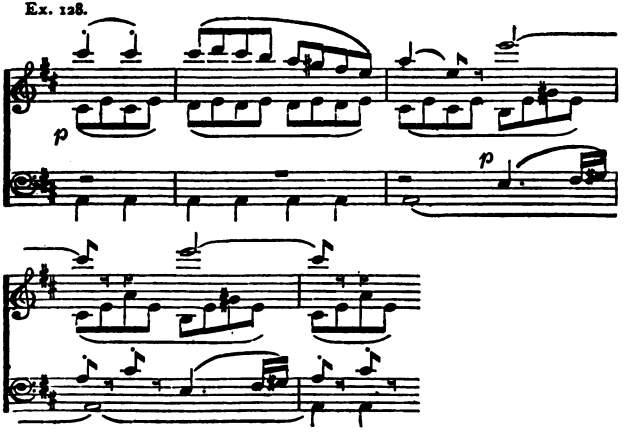
fully that the essential weakness is disguised. In the Trio the 'cellist, who has been a little in the background during the Minuet, is placated by being given a long and very effective tune to perform. He is also privileged to lead off the Finale, with a theme which starts with the same notes as the principal subject of the first movement, cast in a different rhythm, the viola supplying the only accompaniment :

Ex. 127.



In many ways this is the most completely satisfying movement of the quartet. It is in Rondo form, and is for the most part designed diatonically on the broadest lines. Such a quietly joyous subject as this secondary theme, for instance, comes upon us like a breath of fresh sea-air : it is so spaciously laid out, so suggestive of sunshine and a clear sky :

Ex. 128.

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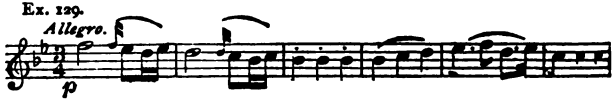
The B flat Quartet (K. 589) has a first movement which starts with a rather slender principal theme, of minuet-like character, and in 6-bar rhythm :

Ex. 129.

Very soon the 'cellist is again brought into the limelight to announce the opening phrases of a conventional 2nd subject, and to execute chains of florid solo passages, lightly accompanied and never obcured. The development section is very loosely put together and has little progressive interest. The Larghetto which follows has yet another high 'cello melody for its principal material. It is a facile piece of music, but somewhat artificial, making much play of scale passages, both for melodic figuration and accompaniment.

The Minuet presents no special features of interest, but the Trio, in E flat, is noteworthy for its skilful lay-out of a busy accompaniment (a blend of staccato quavers and semiquavers) to a cheerful bird-like theme :

Ex. 130.

The Finale, quite a captivating little Rondo, slightly recalls the mood of the first movement of the other B flat Quartet (K. 458), but will not bear comparison with it, either as regards freshness of invention or skill in presentation. There is a pleasant suggestion of

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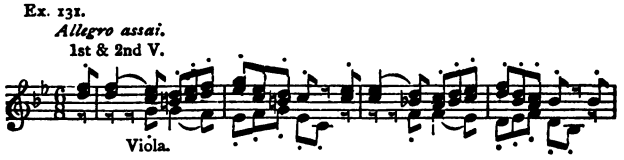
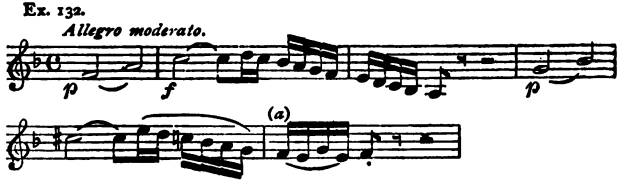
cherubic innocence in its main theme, however, which lingers in the memory:

Ex. 131.

It is quite a short movement which does not outstay its welcome, and there are some effective little touches in the progress of its brief career. One in particular should be cited—a sudden plunge into D flat major for the second appearance of the principal subject, a device which adds a touch of colour to the surroundings and averts all chances of monotony.

The last quartet (K. 590) of this rather pathetic sequence of three is in the key of F, and holds, perhaps, a rather less distinguished place amongst Mozart's works than the previous two. The first movement has a subject which, for Mozart, is decidedly poor and lacking in distinction.

Ex. 132.

Much use is made of repeated-note accompaniment when the 'cello takes up the theme on its own later on. The old inventiveness and love of adventure seem certainly to have deserted the composer here,

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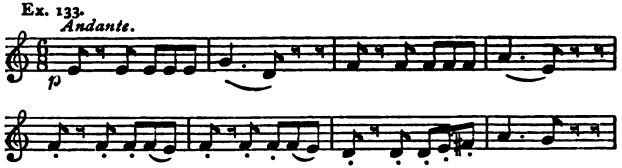
and even the little phrase at (*a*), from which one expects much, is rather dully dealt with. He is attempting to make bricks without straw—even without clay.

The Andante, in C, which follows has even less interest, and after the statement of a somewhat colourless melody, rather stiffly harmonized,

Ex. 133.

the composer is principally concerned with semiquaver decorations of a quite primitively conventional type. The 'cello again has a great deal to say, but nowhere is there anything much beyond complacent pattern-making for its own sake.

The Minuet is interesting rhythmically, the chief subject being in two sections each of 7-bar rhythm. The first section is as follows :

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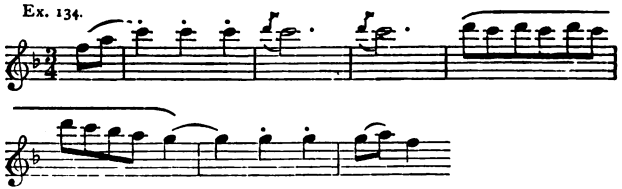
Neither here nor in the Finale is there any special prominence of the 'cello part. The composer seems to have forgotten his royal patron and become more interested in the music. The Finale, indeed, is a notable awakening. Without being one of Mozart's best movements it is easily the most fertile as well as

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the most charming section of this particular work. The playful opening by the 1st violin seems suddenly to have recaptured some of the composer's first youth :

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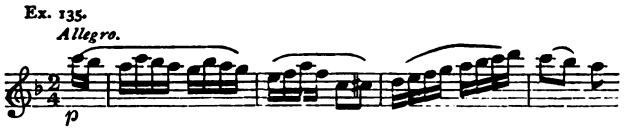
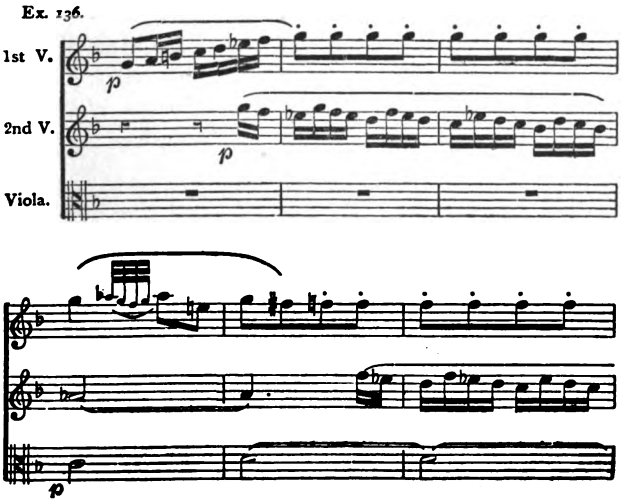

After eight bars the viola takes up the strain, and there is a little contest for supremacy, 1st violin and viola continuing to vie with one another for pride of place for some time. The running semiquavers still occupy a place (in the background, however) when the charming 2nd subject arrives, and here is certainly a sign that Mozart's freshness of invention had not deserted him :

Ex. 136.

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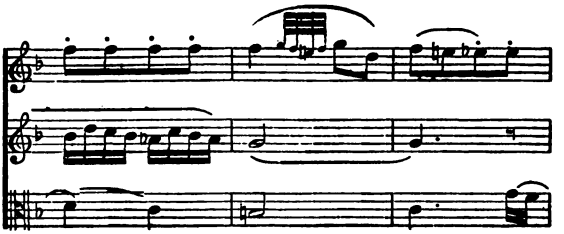
This has real freedom and resiliency as well as simple grace. There is a flash of the old brilliance, too, just after the double-bar. The first part ends, as usual, with a cadence in the dominant (C major), after which, with no preparation, there is a magic touch. The three lower strings dive down to a chord of D flat major, which is held in position while the 1st violin executes an enterprising variant of the glittering semiquaver figures already mentioned. If this had occurred in a work by Beethoven, reams would have been written by commentators about it; hidden away in one of Mozart's least-known and most unfortunate quartets, it has quite escaped notice.

The sequence of keys which follows this effective stroke will be found to be a bold one. The semiquaver patterns are imitated at closer distances and are varied by widespread arpeggio groupings. It is all tremendously alive. After a regular, normal recapitulation there is a Coda which is extraordinarily full-toned and vivid and modern in sound for Mozart. Certain bars of it might almost be by Brahms in his most Hungarian mood, for after a bustling *fugato* passage, in which scraps of the subject are played against each other by inversion, we reach:

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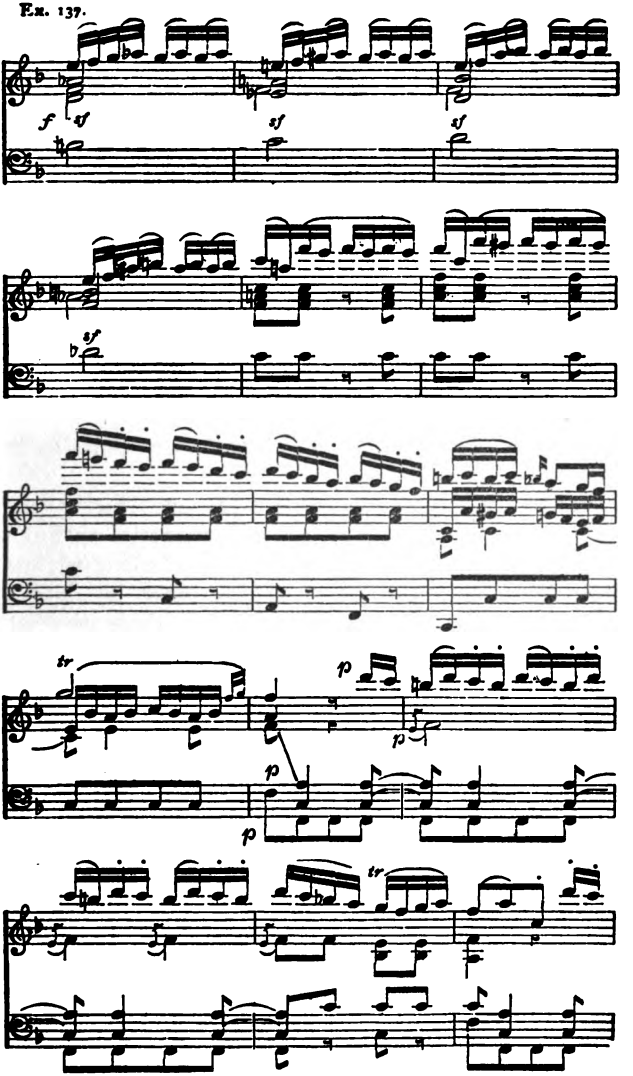
Ex. 137.

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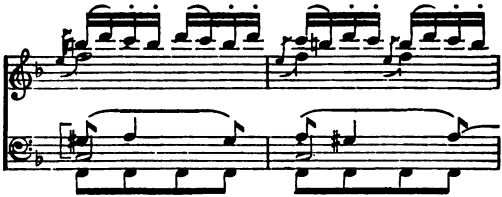

And so on, without loss of energy, to the appointed finish. There are surprising things here. The bravery of the *sf* chords in the first four bars, the restless syncopation of the viola coupled with the rhythmic insistence of the 2nd violin later on, and the effect of the harsh soft harmony and wide distribution of parts in the last two bars quoted—all these are points to be noted with admiration.

One is glad that Mozart's last quartet, which began so poorly, should end with an energetic outburst which proves that the old fire could still be kindled, and that his genius was not wholly crushed by bodily weariness and the sorrows of the spirit which weighed so heavily upon him.

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